

Pentecost

Ps. 67: 1 – 3

Ps. 26: 1 – 3, 7

Hymn 21: 6, 7

Hymn 37: 2, 4

Ps. 51: 3, 4

Scripture reading: Lev. 23: 9 – 21; Acts 2:1 – 47

Text: Acts 2: 37 – 47

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

In the second half of the previous century the charismatic movement started to grow tremendously. Thousands and thousands of charismatic churches sprang up. They are not all the same. There is a great multitude of different streams and groups within the charismatic movement. They don't have a confession of faith that binds them all together. Almost each one of them goes his own direction – as each one claims to be guided directly by the Holy Spirit.

But there are some errors which are characteristic of the whole movement. The whole movement is very much focused on the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. Christ is then the starting point, but the baptism with the Holy Spirit becomes the focus point of their faith and religious experience.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit they also call the second blessing. The first blessing is to receive faith in Christ. The second blessing is then a Pentecost experience in which you receive the Spirit in abundance. Most charismatic movements say that this second blessing, or baptism with the Spirit, is marked by wonders and signs and especially with the speaking in tongues.

Pentecost, then, repeats itself over and over again in the life of each individual who is baptized with the Spirit. The search for this second baptism, and the boasting in the Spirit and in the gifts of the

Spirit – especially the extraordinary gifts of wonders and signs and the speaking in tongues – is the focus point of the whole movement.

Now, those who are caught in such a charismatic mind frame accuse the Reformed churches that we do not give enough attention to the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit.

Look at our confessions for example. The Heidelberg Catechism devotes only one Lord's Day, LD 20, to the Spirit. And then it is also the shortest Lord's Day in the whole catechism. Of the Holy Spirit we simply confess that He is with the Father and Son true and eternal God, and second, that He is also given to me to make me by true faith share in Christ and all His benefits, to comfort me and to remain with me forever.

And in the Belgic Confession we have only one short article, Art. 11, about the Spirit. And there we simply confess that He is true and eternal God. Again that is maybe the shortest article of the whole Belgic Confession.

And when we turn to the Cannons of Dort there is much reference to the work of the Spirit with regard to faith and regeneration, but no separate article devoted specifically to the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Is the accusation then valid that the Reformed churches give too little attention to the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit?

Dear congregation, when we turn to Holy Scripture we see the same as in our confessions. The Holy Spirit is almost always in the background. And there is a reason for this. It is the Holy Spirit who spoke through the prophets and apostles, and it is He who works faith in our hearts through the preaching and so joins us to Christ, but the task and purpose of the Spirit in all of Scripture and in all of our salvation is not to focus the attention on Himself. Instead, the Holy Spirit Himself focuses our attention on the Father and the Son. And with regard to our redemption and salvation He focuses our attention especially on what the Father has given us in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ Himself said that when the Holy Spirit comes "**He will testify of Me**" – John 15: 26

And again Jesus said that He, the Spirit of truth, when He has come, "**will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you**. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you" – John 16: 14, 15.

He says that the Spirit, when He is poured out, will proclaim Christ and all that belongs to Christ. He will testify of Me and glorify Me and proclaim to you what belongs to Me, Jesus said.

All the work of the Spirit is focused on what the Father gives and does through His Son Jesus Christ, and in the whole gospel of salvation the Holy Spirit focuses our attention on the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the focus of Scripture – a focus which the Holy Spirit Himself has worked.

Wherever the Holy Spirit is present, there Christ is glorified.

Dear congregation, usually when we hear the word “Pentecost”, we think first of all of the work of the Holy Spirit. And this is not totally wrong, for it was indeed on the day of Pentecost that Christ poured out in abundance His Spirit on His church. The apostle Peter also, on the day of Pentecost, says that it is the exalted Christ who has now poured out His Spirit.

However, on the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter preaches a sermon about Christ. His sermon deals with Christ’s resurrection from the dead and that the Father has made Jesus both Lord and Christ.

The focus of his message does not deal with the Person and work of the Spirit, nor does his preaching focus on the gift of tongues. No, driven by the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, he proclaims Christ, glorifies Christ and proclaims all that belong to Christ.

Pentecost was a climax in the revelation of the glory of Christ, a climax in the work which Christ has wrought.

The message of Pentecost is not a message that we hear once a year on a certain date of the year; it is part of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the same gospel that is proclaimed to us every Sunday.

This morning I proclaim God’s Word to you with the theme:

Pentecost is the fruit of Christ’s resurrection.

We will note...

- i. The meaning of Pentecost
- ii. The Spirit works faith and repentance
- iii. Christ gathers a church for Himself by His Word and Spirit

In the first place we note...

The meaning of Pentecost

In the Old Testament Pentecost was called the feast of the first fruits. During this feast the first fruits of the harvest were devoted to the Lord. A sheaf of the first grain had to be brought in on the first day of the week – on the day after the Sabbath. The offering of new grain had to be presented fifty days later, also on the first day of the week – the day after the seventh Sabbath. And this is where the word Pentecost comes from. Pentecost means fiftieth – referring to the fifty days between the first sheaf of grain and the offering of new grain.

Now, this feast of first fruits found its fulfillment on the day of Pentecost. This feast of first fruits pointed to the fruit of Christ's death and resurrection. Christ Himself was the first sheaf of grain, the firstfruit of the harvest. Scripture speaks about Christ as the beginning, the firstborn from the dead - Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5. "...Christ is risen from the dead, and has become ***the firstfruits*** of those who have fallen asleep" – 1 Cor. 15:20.

Christ was the first to rise from the dead – Acts 26:23.

When we hear this, that Christ is called the beginning of the harvest, the firstborn from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, and that He was the first to rise from the dead, we are reminded of the feast of the firstfruits. And every time when Christ is called the first of the harvest, Scripture joins it together with His resurrection from the dead. He is the first of a countless multitude who will be raised from the dead.

Christ's resurrection guarantees the rest of the harvest that will follow. Our resurrection is the infallible fruit of His death and resurrection.

Also in, 1 Cor. 15, where the apostle deals with the resurrection of the dead, he says that Christ is ***the firstfruits***, and that the rest will be made alive at His second coming – verse 23.

Now, the feast of the firstfruits finds its **first** fulfillment on the day of Pentecost here in Acts chapter 2. That is why the apostle Peter explains the events of Pentecost with a sermon on Christ's death and resurrection, because: **that** is what Pentecost is about.

Pentecost, which means fifty, happened fifty days after Christ's resurrection. The very name of this feast connects the fruit with Christ's resurrection.

The fruit that is gathered in on Pentecost, the first New Testament congregation, is the fruit of Christ's death and resurrection.

Now, the apostle Peter starts his sermon by saying that the speaking in tongues is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. And then? We would expect a sermon on the Holy Spirit and the work of the Spirit, would we not? Or a sermon on the gifts of the Spirit; the gift of prophesy and the speaking in tongues.

But no, Peter draws the attention of the multitude to Christ and His resurrection from the dead. And he explains it from Psalm 16: 8 – 11.

In Acts 2 from verses 22 – 32 he shows that Jesus is the Christ who had to die, but who – according to the Scriptures – rose again.

And then he tells the gathering that the outpouring of the Spirit is the work of "this Jesus whom you crucified". He now sits at the right hand of God.

"...God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (verse 36)

It is this Jesus, the Christ, who has poured out His Spirit according to the promise.

He reigns at the right hand of the Father until the Father will make all His enemies a footstool for his feet.

Do you see what message the apostle proclaims on the day of Pentecost? Jesus is the Christ. He died and was raised as the prophets have spoken. He is no longer in the grave. He sits at God's right hand and it is He who poured out the Spirit of God. He is the Lord; and all His enemies will be put under His feet.

That was the message proclaimed on the day of Pentecost. When the multitude heard **this** message that there is salvation in the Name of this Jesus, the Christ – who was raised from the dead and who reigns at the right hand of God – three thousand of them repented and believed.

It happens on the feast of firstfruits. It was to celebrate this very feast of firstfruits that they were all gathered. And now the shadow finds its fulfillment. The 3000 who believed were the new grain offering to the Lord, a congregation of Christ sanctified for God. The sheaf of grain became bread, the firstfruits to the Lord, according to Lev. 23.

Dear congregation, we have to note that all these things happened as it was prescribed in the law of Moses. Christ dies as the Passover Lamb on the precise day of the appointed month on which the Passover lamb **had** to be slaughtered – all according to the prescriptions in the Law of Moses. And He rises as the firstfruits from the dead on the day of the firstfruits. Fifty days after His resurrection the Holy Spirit is poured out, on the fiftieth day, that is: the day of Pentecost, and 3000 are made alive in Christ. They are the firstfruits of the great harvest which Christ is now gathering in His barn. They are the fruit of His resurrection.

Pentecost points us to Christ: His resurrection from the dead and the fruit of His resurrection and His glorification. The glorious harvest which Christ wrought by His death, His Spirit is now gathering in.

It happens through the simple words of Peter that Christ died for us and rose again from the dead. This Jesus is the Christ, our Lord, who will also come to judge. Let everyone repent of his sins and believe the gospel.

Congregation, we too, who are together here this morning, are part of this harvest being gathered in.

Now that we know what Pentecost means, we will note in the second place that...

The Spirit works faith and repentance

Peter stands up proclaiming to everyone that the last days have come; the last days of which the prophet Joel prophesied. It is the last days before the judgment of God will come.

Yes, the apostle reminds us of the coming judgment, and in **this** context he proclaims redemption: “... everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved” (verse 21). And the redemption, he says, is in Christ who died for us, who rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of God.

The crowd who shouted: “Crucify, crucify Him!” is now cut to the heart. Not because Peter is such a good speaker or lecturer using such convincing and logical arguments; also not because their healthy minds and good reason convinces them of the truth. No, when they hear the gospel they are cut to the heart, because the Holy Spirit gave them faith.

Thousands did **not** believe. All of Israel was gathered for this feast, but only 3000 believed the message. And **no** one would ever have believed! But now the biggest wonder of Pentecost happens: sinners come to repentance and faith because the Holy Spirit is poured out in their hearts.

The apostle Peter continues his preaching and he applies the message of salvation in the following way; he says:

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” – verses 38, 39.

Repent! Repentance is the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new. The dying of the old nature is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sin, and more and more to hate it and flee from it.

The coming to life of the new nature is a heartfelt joy in God through Christ, and a love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

And it is the Holy Spirit who works this in us.

Christ is proclaimed and the Spirit works faith. **This** is the work of the Spirit of which we read on the day of Pentecost.

The simple fisherman, Peter, is inspired by the Spirit to preach Christ. And through the simple and plain exposition of the Scriptures, the Spirit works faith in their hearts, and thousands believe.

The apostle does not give a dogmatic exposition to them of what repentance should be. And he does not give a systematic explanation of how it should happen, or a method, or a recipe. No, he simply says: Repent! And through the preaching of the gospel the Holy Spirit grants it to them.

Dear congregation, we too have to repent – every day! As often as we go astray, so often the Lord calls us to repentance and faith and obedience.

Let us then, while we listen to the wonder which Christ gave to others on the day of Pentecost, realize also our own sin and guilt before God, and with confession of our sins turn to Christ and believe the gospel.

This new life which the Spirit gives us in Christ is a life of faith and obedience, of repentance and sanctification, a life that grows in the unity of the faith, that stands firm in the truth; a new life of love and sacrifice.

Brothers and sisters, we received the Holy Spirit, and we know this not through some strange experience, but through a new life of obedience through faith in Christ.

By **this** the work of the Spirit is known.

The gift of the Spirit, and also to be filled with the Spirit, is part of the promise of the covenant. The promise which Christ has given that He will pour out His Spirit, that He will baptize with His Spirit and with fire, is part of the promise which God already made with Abraham.

For it is through the Spirit of God that we are raised from our spiritual death. It is through the Spirit that we receive faith and all the treasures and riches which are in Christ. It is through the Spirit that we are grafted into Christ and became children of God. It is in this way that God becomes **our** God and that the promise of the covenant finds its fulfillment.

Without the working of the Spirit no faith is possible, no adoption as children, **no fulfillment of the promise.**

The Holy Spirit makes us to share in all the blessings of the covenant by joining us to Christ. It is the Spirit who unites us to Christ and to all His riches. It is through the Spirit that we call God our Father.

It is through the Spirit that we walk in communion with our God.

And this promise of the covenant is also for our children. As the Apostle says: "...the promise is to you and to your children..." – Acts 2:39.

This promise is to the believer and his children.

Yes, the promise is also for our children. This gospel was signed and sealed to them at their baptism.

But the promise reaches out even further: the promise is also "to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call". That is the heathens who were far from God, to whom the gospel will now be preached, those whom the Lord will call through His Word and Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, we are not Jews by nature. We are not the physical descendants of Abraham. And yet we are reckoned to be his children – all who believe in Christ – Gal. 3: 29. It no longer makes any difference to which people or race we belong. We, who were afar off, may now also hear the gospel and receive the promise of adoption.

The promise to be filled with the Spirit of God is also made to us and to our children.

Repent and believe the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection, and you will be filled with the Spirit.

What does that mean?

The visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as on the day of Pentecost, is not repeated over and over again at the conversion of each individual. The signs and wonders which took place at Pentecost were part of the signs and wonders which characterized the ministry of Christ and also the whole ministry of the apostles. As we read in Hebrews 2:4 that the signs and wonders and miracles and gifts of the Spirit were to testify to the divine origin of the gospel. But when God had completed His revelation of this gospel, the wonders and miracles which characterized the time of the apostles have ceased.

The signs and the wonders were given with a specific purpose: it was God testifying to the fact that the Word preached by the apostles was indeed from God.

But God has completed His revelation and gave it to us in the Scriptures. His work of revelation through the prophets and apostles has come to completion. His Word has been given to us in writing, and no one may add to it. God does not give new revelations today which may be added to His Word. He does not give new prophets or new prophecies. No, the church is being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. That foundation is laid once and for all.

After the day of Pentecost it did indeed happen that the apostles placed their hands on people and that they received the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim the gospel in other languages – as in Acts 19:6. And on all their mission journeys signs and wonders took place. But, it was a very specific time in which God was revealing His Word through the apostles; and that time has come to an end. We do not need new signs and wonders today, because we **have** God's Word.

The signs and wonders which we should believe are recorded for us in the Bible. Through **these** signs and wonders God witnessed to the fact that the apostles were sent by Him, and that the gospel truly came from God. But God doesn't need to confirm the gospel to us today through **new** signs and wonders.

He wants us simply to believe His Word. And in His Word all the signs and wonders are recorded for us, and they still have the same power to confirm God's Word to us when we read of them.

The Lord does not have to repeat the signs and the wonders which He has done in Egypt; they are preserved in holy Scriptures and in the hearts of everyone who believe. God doesn't have to repeat the wonders and the signs which He has done through Elijah, for they are engrafted in our hearts when we read the Scriptures.

The same applies for the signs and wonders of Pentecost.

Various charismatic movements teach that Pentecost has to repeat itself over and over again. According to them every one who receive faith has to experience Pentecost anew by speaking in tongues, prophesying, and by experiencing new wonders and signs.

But that's not the meaning of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was not poured out to entertain us with all sorts of experiences and with signs and wonders. The Holy Spirit was poured out to grant us faith in Christ, to unite us with Christ, and to sanctify us in Christ, in order that we will more and more live in and through Christ.

Pentecost shows us **the firstfruits** of Christ's death and resurrection that is gathered in His barn. Three thousand repented and believed. That is what Christ has done on Pentecost. And He still continues this work. The promise to be filled with His Spirit is for us and for our children and to all who hear and believe the gospel.

After the apostle proclaimed the promise to them and reminded them of the judgment that is to come, we read in verse 40:

“And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying: Be saved from this perverse generation.”

The perverse generation of which he speaks, was very religious. It was especially the scribes and Pharisees and the religious Jews who rejected Christ. The corrupt generation is not only the heathens who walk in darkness who never heard the gospel.

All those **religious** men who did not put their trust in Christ – **they** are called a wicked generation.

It is not good enough to be religious.

Without faith in Christ every man is wicked and perverse.

Yet, with the words “perverse generation” he means also the wickedness of the world in which we live. And he warns us that we have to flee from it. Yes, with many other words he warned them and he pleaded with them: Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.

Exhort also your children to repent and to flee from the pollution of this world, to be alert and to walk carefully. For the promise is also to them with the command: repent and believe.

The Spirit calls us and our children continually through the proclamation of this gospel, also at home with family devotions. When we open God's Word the Spirit is present to fill us with faith and love and knowledge and hope. As often as we hear the gospel and repent and believe the Spirit fills us with joy in the Lord, and equip us with every gift we need to serve God.

We note in the third place that...

Christ gathers a church for Himself by His Word and Spirit

Christ is gathering a congregation for Himself.

Titus 2:14 says that Christ “gave Himself for us, that He may redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works”

And we see this so clearly on the day of Pentecost. Through His death Christ has purified a special people for Himself, zealous for good works. When the Spirit gives faith to the elect to trust in Christ, they become one people, a holy people, zealous for good works.

We read it here in our text that those who gladly received the word “continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” – verse 42.

These are the marks of a true church. Those who believed also continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine. It means they were eager to be equipped with the Word of the Lord. They continued steadfastly in it, not departing from it to the left or to the right. They preserved the word **as** the apostles preached it to them.

That they continued steadfastly in the doctrine of the apostles also means that they ***lived*** according to it.

They also continued steadfastly in the fellowship. The fellowship does not only refer to the fellowship of the apostles, but also the fellowship with one another – the fellowship or communion of the saints. This fellowship includes mutual exhortation and encouragement, to edify one another in the faith and to correct one another with the Word of God.

This fellowship also includes church discipline.

They also continued steadfastly in the breaking of bread; that is: in celebrating the Lord’s Supper.

And they continued steadfastly in prayers.

They immediately form one community, one body in Christ, all continuing steadfastly in the true doctrine and in the communion of saints – a congregation zealous for good works, a people whom Christ purified for Himself through His death and made alive through His resurrection.

This also is the work of the Spirit; **therefore** they continued steadfastly. It is the Spirit who inflames them and joins them together. Therefore all who believed were together – verse 44.

We read: “...all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” – verse 44, 45.

That they had everything in common does not mean that the right of possession was taken away. Acts 4:32 to 5:11 explain the situation a bit further. Those who had plenty, did not keep their possessions for themselves, but distributed to the poor according to their needs.

They “sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” – verse 45. It does not mean that they sold everything they had, but that the brother who had plenty shared his wealth with those who were in need. No one said that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common – 4:32.

The one who had much also gave much to those in need, so that no one in the congregation was suffering want anymore.

This also was the work of the Spirit. He binds the believers together in such a way, that no one calls his possessions his own any more, even though it *is* his own. They served one another with joy.

The belongings to which we by nature cling so much, which no one may touch, are now sold. Dear congregation, who of us will do this? Who will sell one of his properties to help a poor member in the congregation?

Has Christ not also taught us that the one who has two garments has to give one to the one who don't have?

Yes, the members of the congregation gave themselves with all their possessions completely to each other, serving one another.

It is a love and a unity which only the Holy Spirit can work.

Furthermore we see that **every day** they continued to meet together in the temple, daily with one accord – verse 46. They had such a hunger for the Word that no one wanted to stay away from the temple, for there the apostles instructed the multitudes – at least until the persecution broke loose.

But while they still had the opportunity to gather at the temple, they gathered daily. All of them together, with one accord, went up to listen to the instruction of the apostles.

Once again this is the work of the Holy Spirit. By nature we are all blind and deaf to the Word of God and by nature we do not desire to be instructed by the Word. But when we are filled with the Spirit, we long to be constantly fed with the Word of God, then we gather all together in the worship services, and make use of every opportunity to be instructed by God's Word. Then we are also glad when it is time again for family devotions; and excited to go to the church services. Then we do not want to miss one service!

This also is the work of the Holy Spirit.

There was also no individualism. Everyone did not believe on his own, and in his own manner, serving the Lord his own way. No, those who believed were together, they did everything with one accord, one in the faith, one with each other, one in heart and mind.

If anyone wants to be a Christian all on his own, separated from the congregation, he does not have the Spirit of God.

All of them together with one accord they continued steadfastly in the doctrine of the apostles, and **every day** they all went together to the temple in order that all of them may together be instructed in the doctrine.

And they broke bread from house to house, and ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God.

Their joy was not generated by outward display or glitter. No, in all simplicity and with humble hearts they lived soberly. While they sold their belongings and had fellowship with the humble, they knew true joy in the Lord.

They were no longer chasing each one after his own honor and his own ambitions, but exercised the communion of saints in all simplicity and with humble love.

It is another wonder that the Spirit worked.

And while they lived in such simplicity praising God, they were also in favor with all the people – verse 47. The people who did not believe were astonished by what they saw: the unity, the simplicity and sincerity, the joy in the Lord and the love that sacrifices everything for another. A congregation of Christ zealous for good works – **that** is the wonder of Pentecost!

Christ is gathering a special people for Himself through His Word and Spirit.

And then we read, the last sentence of verse 47: “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved”.

The Lord saves, and those whom He saves, **He** adds to the church. **He** joins them to the congregation. If the Lord has not joined a man to the congregation, then he is not saved. Those whom **He** saves, He also unites with the congregation. The congregation is Christ’s gathering work and He joins us together to be one body.

Does your heart start to burn within you when you hear of such a congregation?

Shall we not pray the Lord that He may also fill us with His Spirit and make us such a congregation, zealous for good works, and that He may unite us in the unity of faith to serve Him together with such a love?

Or is this all part of history?

No, surely this work of the Spirit has not ceased. We received the Spirit already when we came to faith in Christ. For no one can believe in Christ if the Spirit of God does not dwell in him. If we believe in Christ, we may be sure that the Spirit of God dwells in us.

And yet, we also have the instruction from God, the command: **be filled** with the Holy Spirit – Eph. 5:18.

We do not have to search for this in all sorts of strange manners, seeking for some strange experiences. We simply have to believe the gospel and repent.

The promise is also for us and for our children.

Of ourselves we are not able to do anything good. In ourselves we have no power or life. In ourselves we would remain in sin and death. It is the Spirit of God that gives life. He raises us up unto a new life as He makes us to share in the power of Christ’s resurrection.

Do you see what Pentecost means? It is the firstfruits of Christ's death and resurrection. Christ is gathering a congregation for Himself, zealous for good works.

Through Christ we may again call upon God: Father – our Father!

The promise is also for us, and for our children.

Amen.